DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 732 SO 031 779

AUTHOR Smith, Peter
TITLE Violence and Art Education.
PUB DATE 2000-04-00
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Art Education Association (Los Angeles, CA, March 30-April 4, 2000).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescent Attitudes; *Aggression; *Art Education; Bullying; Crisis Management; Educational Responsibility; Elementary Secondary Education; *Intervention; Mass Media Role; School Culture; Self Concept; Socialization; *Violence

ABSTRACT

This article examines violence, socialization, and implications for art educators. Section 1 discusses violence as learned behavior within Lonnie Athens' notion of "violentization" or socialization to violence. In this framework, violent individuals first undergo "brutalization," a period during which they experience or witness violence, followed by a stage of "belligerency" in which being violent preempts being hurt. Next "violent performances" are committed, and then, "virulency," a stage in which the individual gains notoriety and respect as a violent person, occurs. In Section 2, the author discusses the implications of Athens' theory for art education. The presence of an art program in a school is seen as an indicator of a humanistic educational approach. However, art teachers and students live in an increasingly complex world, so the work against violence is increasingly complicated. The arts can give teachers insights into student thinking. However, Smith claims that art teachers are often not attentive to imagery and argues that they must turn their attention to the content of student artwork in order to become more aware of student attitudes toward violence. Schools tend to be places where some violent acts are ritualized and thus become sites of violentization. Art teachers, especially at the secondary level, should design lessons that explore the theme of violence using art as a means to explore students' thoughts and to counsel students toward a more peaceful world view. (KC)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 441 732

Violence and Art Education

Paper Presented at the National Art Education Association Convention

March 30 – April 4, 2000
Los Angeles, CA

Peter Smith
Professor and Coordinator
Art Education
University of New Mexico

SO 031 779

Peter Smith

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Violence and Art Education

Let's pretend that New York City has eight million people. Today one hundred people are murdered. That's awful. It should never have happened. We rightly cry out in outrage. However, don't forget that 7,999,900 were not murdered. We could play on figures like this endlessly, but my point is that violence must be studied within contexts. While it must be scrutinized and dealt with, we do ourselves little service by becoming psychologically overwhelmed.

Violence as Learned Behavior

Violent individuals—except those who strike out in sudden provoked rage—have gone through what Lonnie Athens (Miller, 2000) calls violentization, a socialization to violence.

First they undergo "brutalization." This includes suffering violence, witnessing violence, and coaching in using violence. Second, the potentially violent person enters the stage of "belligerency." Being violent preempts being hurt. I hurt so I will not be hurt. Then comes "violent performances" in which the person undergoing violentization vanquishes another after little or no provocation. Violence, the learner comes to realize, "works." Finally, the learner reaches the stage of "virulency." Violence brings notoriety, fear-filled respect. The self-image is enhanced through violence. All art teachers are for positive self-image, but they often forget that a strong self-image can be constructed through socially negative means.

Athens feels that intervention can intercept the process of violentization. "'You can't guarantee everyone a perfect family', he says, 'but you could guarantee people a perfect education"' (Miller, 2000 p A22). What I've described is Athens 'natural history' of the making of violent people and his prescription for thwarting violentization. Where does this leave art in education?

Let's not get simplistic. There is no absolute connection between making art and not being a violent person. The career of Caravaggio tells us that. There are, however, bridges from art in school to intervention in violentization.

School Intervention

First, the presence of the arts in schools is both a signal and contributing factor in what I'll call a humanistic education. The inclusion of the arts indicates that the school is probably concerned about human values and diverse learning styles and talents.

Second, the arts open up a window for the teachers into the thinking of the students. This is really an extension of the premise that the arts signal concern for human values. The arts give a less guarded view – less guarded than words – about what students are feeling and thinking.

But let's look again at the Athens steps in violentization. Our students will come to us brutalized through media saturation. The media not only shows violence, they show it committed by heroes, the figure held up to admire. So in a sense, the students will have been coached to be violent. They may also have undergone bullying. By high school brutalization will probably be quite complete unless counter measures at home and in school have been undertaken. Since there is little possibility that the media can be forced into restraint, this school (and home) intervention must be universal and intensive.

Art teachers, even at the early educating years, must carefully attend to the imagery of students. Preaching will not suffice. Back in the 1950s, if a student drew swatiskas I could rule that they were not permissible and give short reasons why an American student would reject such images on ethical and nationalistic grounds. Skinheads and Aryan supremacists groups were not a threat to

my students' welfare in those days. Nowadays the art teacher needs to carefully examine the imagery the students create, make note of it, and watch where it seems to be leading. Mere suppression in a classroom does not mean fixation on violence will not be expressed elsewhere. School, after all, lasts about one quarter of the day; school days equal only a little more than half the days of the year. The art teacher must discuss the imagery with the student, try to understand it, and try to get the student to understand where her or his imagery leads and what it says to their own lives and fates.

Art Class and Intervention

At this point you'll be wondering about objectives and goals for lessons and how to include this in assessment and what it will do to the scores of those art tests you think may be coming down the pike in the next ten years. Well, right you are to worry because the education that pays absolute attention to the child and the student's needs is not easily compatible with the current education assessment thinking. That current education assessment thinking is somewhat like the idea that longer jail terms and prisons will end crime. That is, more testing will end ignorance.

Art teachers tend not to be good attenders to imagery. They are usually trained in how to get good looking results from students and they reward production of results up to preconceived standards. This is not paying attention to what students are saying, hinting at, or inadvertently expressing through their imagery.

If the student reaches the stage of belligerency every alarm bell in every educator's head should be ringing. Unfortunately, roughing up people is often treated as "boys will be boys." Schools institutionalize and glorify certain forms of violence—football, for example. If you could have one look at me you would know sports were a negative experience for me, but there are sports that turn

aggression into ritual behavior and the dissipation of violence (or aggression to play on Lorenz's theories) through sport is, perhaps, good. However, in too many high schools and colleges there is glorification of violent athletics and toleration of off playing field bullying and violence that play into both brutalization and belligerency. How many stories have you heard that could be classified as "violent performances" by school or college athletes? Schools must carefully control both glorification of too extreme sports and rigorously guard against off playing field violence.

Again art teachers must watch imagery. They may also want to deal with themes related to violence and the cultural contexts and consequences of violence as revealed in art and mass art. The close association of racism and violence might, for example, be dealt with in the high school classes.

Once violent performances are being carried out, danger has reached a level that may call for major interventions. The video and the website expressions of the perpetrators of the Columbine tragedy could be considered rehearsals for violent performances. That they were overlooked is truly alarming. Nothing a student makes is not worth looking at thoroughly, although it has to be admitted that many students seem to have minds identical to copier machines. Some images of violence are just play – of – the – mind. Yet a teacher should never assume harmlessness, most especially in the volatile teenage years.

The final stage of the Athens theory is beyond the scope of schooling in any normal sense.

Conclusion

Finally, violence is evil. It is an absolute violation of human rights, whether you interpret those rights by a secular or a religious code. Yet, as Hannah Arendt told us, evil is banal. We all are part of the problem. If we can use our art teaching to examine what our students are thinking, to counsel them to direct their thinking to healthful peaceful ends, and we find means to establish through art that life is special and meaningfilled, then we will be part of the solution.

Reference

Miller, D.W. (March 17, 2000). A scholar's brutal childhood inspires his theories of violence (pp. 21-22). The chronicle of higher education.